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Hans Tofte—Superspy Caught in the Middle of a CIA Furor

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WASHINGTON, D.C. —
 The life of an Iowa business-
 man was pleasant but un-
 eventful for Hans V. Tofte.

Analysis:
 WHAT THE
 NEWS
 MEANS

He had already lived through a series of experiences that would have done credit to Lawrence of Arabia when the Danish-born Tofte and his Iowa-born wife, Marlys, moved to Iowa with the intention of living out their years in Mason City.

THEY HAD purchased the controlling interest in Klipto Loose Leaf Co. in Mason City from Mrs. Tofte's uncle, John Corsaut. Tofte was determined to be what he considered a typical Midwestern businessman. He joined the Masons, the Rotary Club, the American Legion, the Mason City Chamber of Commerce and the Elks.

Through a mutual interest in military affairs and because of a mutual acquaintanceship through the late Gen. William (Wild Bill) Donovan, wartime head of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Tofte and his wife became close friends of Gen. Hanford MacNider, one of the most distinguished citizens of northeast Iowa.

But even in the first months in Mason City Tofte was in contact with an old friend from his OSS days, Frank G. Wisner. Wisner had become the head of the clandestine operations of the recently created Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).



Donovan MacNider

Wartime record

and he needed an experienced undercover agent to handle planning and execution of operations for the nation's big international spying activity.

TOFTE PASSED off the suggestions that he join the CIA with the comment that he "would be available if you get an emergency that is big enough."

The outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 brought a call from Wisner, asking that he come to Washington, D.C.—He left within hours, and in Washington was told that Wisner considered this emergency large enough, and there was a need for a man with Tofte's experience and, particularly his fluency in Chinese, Japanese and Russian.

There were conferences at the highest levels in government, including the then Defense Secretary Gen. George C. Marshall, and Tofte agreed to accept the assignment—starting from scratch to build the CIA operation in Korea. He was to be based in Tokyo, Japan, and was to work directly with Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

THERE WAS no time for delay. Tofte called his wife in Mason City, told her to pack his clothes, that he was recently created Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

In Tokyo, he used a letter of introduction from MacNider on the stationery of the Northwestern State Portland Cement Co. of Mason City.

"This will be presented to my good friend and fellow townsman, Lieut. Col. Hans V. Tofte, presently at your headquarters," MacNider wrote. "Col. Tofte can tell you in his own story of some rather remarkable service in World War II, a good part of which was spent in the OSS under our mutual friend, Bill Donovan, who considered him one of his ablest and most valuable operatives."

"Col. Tofte has spent a good part of his adult life in the Far East, particularly in Manchuria and China, and would seem to have all the necessary background to be of definite service to you in the present emergency. I have faith in his abilities, his loyalty and his resourcefulness, and I commend him to your consideration for any tasks for which you may feel his experience qualifies him."

In a similar letter to Maj. Gen. C. A. Willoughby, who was in charge of intelligence for MacArthur, MacNider commented:

"TOFTE DID some outstanding work in the last big fracas for Bill Donovan, who told me only a few days ago that he considers him one of the best in almost any capacity for which his experience qualifies him."

That was to be a one-year job for the CIA, but at Wisner's request it stretched on through 1952, and then there were other "special projects" in other parts of the world in 1953 and 1954.

Tofte stepped off from his CIA assignments in 1954, and he has since been in the CIA.

been operating. He jumped into it with the same enthusiasm he had for his work in espionage and unorthodox warfare.

ALSO, starting with a speech before a luncheon group in Clear Lake, Tofte launched a career as a public speaker that won him a wide reputation in the Midwest.

Of course, he was not billed as one of the superspies of the CIA agency, but he could deal publicly with his danger-filled activities in the Danish underground in 1940, his work in 1941 and '42 with the British commandos in guerilla warfare in Burma, his entry into the OSS as an instructor and later as an operator in northern Africa and Yugoslavia, from 1943 through 1946.

The gun-running activities from Italy to Yugoslavia were regarded as essential to

the survival of the forces of Marshal Josip Tito, and Tofte and a Capt. Robert Thompson, who shared the command were decorated by the Yugoslavian

government, and were awarded the Legion of Merit by the United States government with Donovan making the presentation.

Although decorated by Tito's government, Tofte made Tito one of the major targets of his remarks on the Midwestern speaking circuit where he warned that the Yugoslavian Communists could not be called an ally, simply because he was at odds with Tito's government.



Tito

Tofte told his audiences of the ringside seat he had of two totalitarian invasions in Europe. The first was in Austria when Hitler's forces invaded and Tofte, who had been in Austria skiing, was recovering from a broken ankle. He watched the invasion under guard from a Vienna hotel room.

THE SECOND time was in his native Denmark, and that time Tofte was in physical shape to try to do something about it. Within 72 hours he was in the Danish underground, and after a number of dangerous missions he made his way across Germany and France with a German - approved passport listing him as a German.

Tofte was only "on leave of absence" during that 1954 to 1957 period, and there was one depressing period in 1956 when some officers in the CIA Security Division raised questions about his loyalty and indicated that they believed he might be a Soviet agent.

Tofte had worked for the East Asiatic Co. of Copenhagen from 1929 to 1938, and had spent most of that period in China. It is the largest business firm in Copenhagen, and Tofte's father had been a sea captain with the firm for years.

The firm had offices all over the world, and Tofte had no doubt that some Communists had infiltrated the company "just as Communists have infiltrated the branches of some large U.S. corporations in South America today."

Tofte attributed his trouble to "incompetence" of some security people who started to view every person associated with the East Asiatic Company as "a possible Communist."

AS A RESULT of those suspicions, Tofte was asked to come to Washington where he underwent extensive questioning and then insisted on a five-hour turn on a lie detector "to clear myself and also East Asiatic Company for good."

At the time, he told some of his interrogators that "if what you are hinting at is true then I am the most clever foreign agent of all times, and everybody on the



HANS V. TOFTE
From Iowa to CIA

top level in CIA should be fired for having me around."

He passed the lie detector tests without problems, was cleared, and despite the ordeal agreed to come back on active duty with CIA in 1957 after receiving letters and telephone calls from Richard Helms, now the director of CIA, and the late Frank Wisner, then the head of the clandestine activities.

Mrs. Marlys Tofte wanted no more part of the CIA and no more of Washington. She was content in Mason City where she had found many friends, where she was near many relatives.

Mrs. Tofte, born in Parkersburg, reared in Aberdeen, S.D., and Anoka, Minn., had also led an eventful life that included two prior marriages.

She had dropped out of the University of Minnesota in her third year of a pre-law course for a European trip with relatives. There she met a young Marine captain, Julian Brown. They were married and went to the far east, and it was there that Tofte first saw her.

"THERE WAS no romance at that time," Tofte relates now. "She was barely out of her teens, but she was already a great lady in the international set."

He also knew Marlys after she divorced Brown and married a wealthy Italian

money broker and industrialist, Piero Calcina.

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would have seemed out of this world, unbelievable," Tofte explains it now.

All of that changed when they met in New York and Washington in 1943 after she had fled from China with her daughter just before the Japanese invasion and had divorced Calcina. They courted while Tofte was preparing to gain his United States citizenship, and while he was serving as an instructor in mayhem and killing in the special OSS school near the Congressional Country Club west of Washington.

They were married April 4, 1944. The marriage has lasted 22 years, and meant travel to all parts of the world and long periods of anxious waiting.

THEY HAVE lived in luxury, and the huge four-story town house they moved into last week at 2362 Massachusetts Av., had served as the Uruguayan Embassy. It would be surprising if the value is less than \$250,000.

THE PRESENT stir around Tofte and the CIA resulted from their move from a somewhat smaller but luxurious home at 1667 NW. 35th St.

On July 23, Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Slocum and a real estate man came to the home when the Toftes were out and when Mrs. Charlotte Leister, Mrs. Tofte's mother, was alone with the family's two poodles. Slocum, a CIA employee, said he wanted to look at a basement apartment that was to be for rent.

At some point in that visit, Slocum or his wife went to a third floor den where Tofte does his work and found some CIA papers and other papers in a package wrapped in a blanket.

The next day, the Slocums returned on the pretense they wanted to look at the house, again, and brought with them a CIA security officer. Again the Toftes were gone, and Mrs. Leister's attention was pulled away from Slocum's activities. The papers in the third floor room were taken from the house, and Tofte was notified that he should

come to CIA headquarters where he was grilled for nearly a week on the alleged security violation in having CIA papers at home.

HE CONTENTED that most of the top officials took papers home with them, and that it was a fluke or a planned effort to trap him that resulted in the Slocums coming to the home.

Mrs. Tofte has reported to police that \$20,000 in jewels was missing from the home in the same period of the CIA visits, and that there is no indication that anyone else was in the house that was guarded by Mrs. Leister and the two poodles.

Tofte contends that the invasion of his home was "an outrageous invasion of privacy" and that there is no evidence of any compromise of CIA documents. He also has indicated that the documents were largely training papers.

The controversy has upset the CIA, where it is known that Tofte was one of the high ranking officials on some of the most sensitive special projects in recent years in Africa, Asia and South America.

HE HAD a key role in the CIA success in Guatemala, and he was in an important post in the preparation for the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion. Tofte was one of those who warned against the Bay of Pigs, because of poor preparation and bad morale, and has the records to say "I told you so."

Also, at a time when CIA is under fire in Congress, Tofte is one of a handful of men who could give chapter and verse on the Bay of Pigs, the foul-ups that caused it, the paralysis that hit CIA after the incident, and the high level efforts to change the records, cover up the facts and avoid responsibility for the disaster.

Although Tofte has lived with danger for more than 25 years, it is unlikely that he ever dealt with anything as explosive as the present controversy, and from long experience the men at top of CIA know that Hans Tofte is capable of creating great problems for them.

He will go to the office of the security boss at CIA Monday for a conference that probably will determine whether the Tofte matter is settled quietly or whether it erupts into a major expose of the nation's big spy agency.